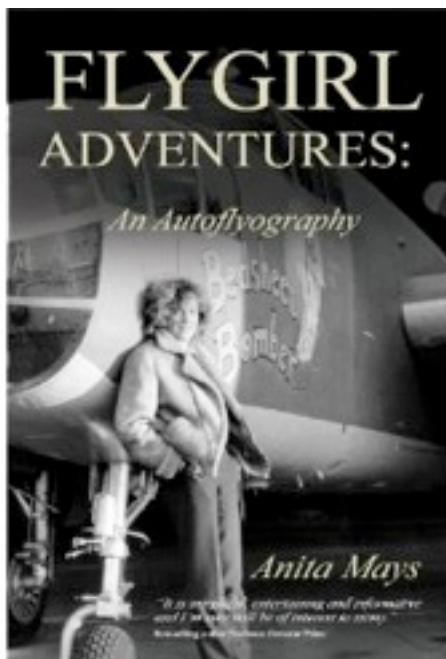




NEWSLETTER

Buffet Lunch on 15 May (details P8)

April Meeting



Those present at our April meeting were entertained by the flying career of Anita Mays. Her presentation was lively, amusing and given with so much passion, you could see she was someone who always enjoyed her flying. They say variety is the spice of life and in her career there was certainly variety!

Living with her parents in Lagos, Nigeria meant at the beginning and end of each term, she had to fly to and from UK. Her parents flew out on a Hermes but by the time Anita came to fly it was VC10 and then

Boeing 707. Having tried unsuccessfully to become an air hostess, she gained her PPL, became an Assistant Flying Instructor before gaining her CPL and started flying for real! B25's, Boeing 727's before entering the, sometimes murky, field of VIP flying. We were entertained by the good and bad sides of some of the owners, passengers and on one occasion crew!

A real aviation enthusiast Anita mentioned that her mother and father met whilst on the Halifax production line at Sherburn in Elmet. We hope to see both her mother and Anita at our Buffet Lunch in September.

Buffet Lunch

Just a quick reminder to get your money into Gerry for our May lunch **no later than Tuesday 7th May**, as we have to give final numbers to the pub the next day. So please send Gerry your cheque (details on Page 8).

In Memoriam

Sadly on 5 Apr 13 **Dave Tideswell** passed away. A pilot who trained with Gerry Sealy-Bell at No3 British Flying Training School, Miami, Oklahoma. He flew Lancasters with 195 Sqn towards the end of the war.

After leaving the RAF he became a Civil Servant. He joined our Branch in 2002 His funeral was held at West Herts Crematorium on Tuesday 16th April, where we were represented



LOTTERY FUNDED

John Franklin



John logged over 4,000 hours in a period of 10 years, flying in a variety of aircraft ranging from the DH Dragon Rapide, Anson's, Botha's, Belenheim's, Halifax's, Lancaster's and Dakota's to Sunderland Flying Boats (in civilian use).

He recalled an early cross country in an Anson (13 OTU Bicester) during which a freak storm over Norfolk caught them without warning of any heavy static and with their aerial trailing. They were struck by lightning, losing all communications along with a few instruments and had to make an emergency landing. The base was for American Flying Fortress's and their personnel could not believe what they saw "Gee, you've not been over Germany in THAT!" The wingtip was still flapping but they soon began to enjoy the situation!

John was involved with the Sicilian invasion in 1943. Of one of these exciting stories he says:- "On 10 Jul 43 our skipper was detailed to tow a Horsa glider loaded with troops by night, to participate in the invasion. Whilst 100 miles from the target the starboard engine developed a severe coolant leak and caught fire. With utmost determination our Pilot Frank Cleaver continued to tow the glider and managed to extinguish the flames.

By this time our aircraft had lost 2,000 feet and was only 500 feet above the sea. He gave the order to both crews to jettison all spare equipment on the tug and also the ammunition. It was then just possible to maintain height but it was impossible to release the glider at the correct height at a distance from the coast, clear of flak. We went in at a very low altitude, a considerable distance inland over flak and searchlights so the glider could be released and land in the correct place. We proceeded back to base on three engines and landed without further damage. This operation was the culmination of continuous ferrying of gliders by our skipper, and many tows across Africa a distance of 1,000 miles in quite arduous conditions. In the light of this he was awarded the DSO. During this time we were based at Sousse. On a similar sortie we landed on the airstrip on only one engine - this time ~I took a more elevated position in the aircraft in readiness for a rough landing. Everyone on the ground kept their heads down as we bounced 50 feet above the tents to the right of the sanded runway and out into the open desert. The lads we had deposited in Sicily had an even more exciting time!"

His last operation with Skipper Frank Cleaver was on 6 Apr 44 in a Halifax of 298 Sqn detailed to supply the Maquis in SW France with canisters carrying high explosives etc.

They were shot down by ack-ack fire from Cognac Airfield. With the aircraft ablaze the Skipper gave the order to 'Bale Out'. With only a 1,000 feet or less John dropped out of the bottom of the forward hatch. He pulled the rip-cord but his chute refused to open. Avoiding panic, he clutched at his chest and presto it functioned! There was just time to catch a glimpse of the Halifax heading for the horizon like a blazing torch. He landed without injury, collected his wits and found a suitable place to bury the 'chute and harness'. Then a figure appeared out of the mist, it was the Flight Engineer Ray Hindle. Together they began the long trek to the Central Pyrenees and into Spain. That all sounds so matter of fact but read on....

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John Franklin - The “Evasion”

The date was 5 Apr 44 at 2200 hours the crew set out on a ‘Special Operation’ from Tarrant Rushton to supply arms and ammunition and a large quantity of explosives by parachute from the bomb bay of a Halifax IV. None of the expected light signals from the ground appeared and thus the sortie was abandoned.

Near Cognac they were caught in anti-aircraft fire and shot down. The actual event is taken from John’s own words:

Our height was about 1,000 ft and the time 0200 hrs as I fell with the chute on my chest falling downwards and backwards. I pulled the ripcord and the handle was in my outstretched hand, but nothing happened. I tore at the pack with my hands and was rewarded with a flash of white in front of me and a sudden jerk upright into the harness. There was no time to admire the view



parachuting from a Halifax

I remember thinking ‘What a mess to get into’ as I was due leave the following day and hoped to see my wife. We had been married only since the 19th February. As I floated down I could see the trail of our burning aircraft and suddenly I floated into low level mist and hit the ground with a thud but thankfully no injuries. First thoughts were to dispose of the parachute. At the edge of the field I had landed in, there was a drainage tunnel and there I buried

my gear. Commonsense told me to get clear of the area as soon as possible, so I started to walk under the cover of darkness. Suddenly I stumbled into Flt Lt Ray Hindle who was stunned and dazed after his fall. He had left his parachute in the field, so I searched for it and eventually found it and hid it with mine in the tunnel. Now, with luck, the enemy would not know our whereabouts or how many crew to look for. We decided to try and avoid capture and make our way back to UK!

As daylight came we found a ditch, with low overhanging trees which gave us a reasonable view across a field to some houses and a minor road. It was now light enough to look at a map from our escape kit. The chocolate in the kit was also very useful! Our plan was to walk by night and hide by day, we also decided to go East then South, which we hoped the Germans would not expect. The first cottage we called at slammed the door in our faces, after all the penalty for assisting an escapee was death! From one of our hiding places we saw a farmer and decided to ask for help as we were desperate to get rid of our uniforms and were hungry. Our luck was in and in an hour he returned with some civilian clothing. Not as warm as our uniform in the cold April nights.

We tried another house but having invited us in they turned a revolver on us, thinking we were Germans trying to catch out the resistance people. We beat a hasty retreat! On 9 Apr having walked all night our luck was in at a small village of Marsanseix. In the early hours of the morning, tired and hungry, we were directed to the house of the Parish Priest. Living in the house were Maurice Marzouk and his wife Andre, who were our first real helpers. The old priest and the couple had connections with the Maquis and were willing to put us in contact with the French underground army. For the next few days we laid low in nearby woods and Maurice and Andre brought us food, whistling ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ if all was safe. Finally escorts took us to a Maquis camp, where they kept a close eye on us until we were identified by radio from London.

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We were then invited to join them on patrols and clandestine activities. The French flag was raised and saluted each morning. They had tapped the local German Garrison telephone system so could disband instantly if the Germans became suspicious. Most were young men but their chief was a WW 1 veteran.

The time came for us to set out on the last part of our journey, with a set of false papers and means of access into the Escape Line in Toulouse, run by Françoise Dissard. My papers said I was a watch maker from Rouen, although I was given an artists paint box and a beret. Our guides were mainly young women but we had to trail them so it did not appear we were together. I noticed our guide did not show her ticket at a station barrier so I did the same. Alas I was called back, immediately showed mine and the ticket collector had a twinkle in his eye, I am sure he knew what was going on. On a train I trod on the foot of an armed German soldier whilst going along to the toilet, I apologised in English, but luckily he did not appear to notice.

Having reached Toulouse our escorts changed to a young lady with a baby. We were taken in and given a meal and the luxury of a bed! It was short lived as Pathfinder Mosquitos flew low overhead dropping flares for the heavy bombers. The raid helped us the next day, as the station was in chaos and we jumped on a lorry full of civilians, which drove us to where the train was waiting up the line. This time there were no soldiers or ticket collectors. Some German border guards did get on the train at the front but we were soon signalled to get off at a small station without a platform but we soon realised we were in the foothills of the Pyrenees. 15 young men alighted here and we could have been arrested if the enemy had been really observant. We walked past the German guards on the train as we made our way to the station yard, where a coach driver beckoned us to get on his bus. As we boarded we saw the bus had no

seats and the driver, smoking furiously, commanded us to lay flat on the floor. We were on our way to the mountains, unless stopped on the way, driven by a very courageous Frenchman. We stopped at a large uninhabited house where a Basque mountain guide soon arrived. He told us to follow him single file through the valley and up into the snow line. We were all airmen on the run but only 3 were RAF, the remainder American. After 2 days walking in early May our guide left us to rest in a mountain hut and said he would be back next morning. We waited but as time went by no sign of him but we could see a patrol approaching. There was no option but to move on. We kept low and proceeded on the hidden side of the valley parallel to the border. We felt unable to attempt the direct route into Spain, with its sheer peaks and steep ravines, without a guide.

Until now I had been content to proceed with the original party but there was a slim chance of us getting over the border as a large group, so an American (John Battilotti), Ray Hindle and myself decided to go it alone. There were no defined paths so we trod over shrubs, trees and grasses to be clutched at or swung from like monkeys. A good way to increase the flow of adrenaline! It was moonlight and our vertical route led us to a pillbox position. There was no choice if we were to make it over the border. The river and the Bridge of Kings on the border could be seen below. What appeared to be a pillbox lookout, luckily turned out to be a giant hoarding of General Franco. So now, at last, there was evidence of Spanish territory. We pressed on for another 10 miles until we were arrested in daylight by the Spanish Civil Guard at Viella. They relieved us of our boots so that our wandering days were temporarily over, while the British Consul was informed of our presence. For a day we languished in the local police station cell, until we were moved into a local hotel by 'courtesy of HM Government'. Sadly we learned that only the leader of the American group had made it across the border.

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This confirmed our fears as we had heard shots in the distance on the last day of our walk into Spain.

From Viella we were moved to Lerida and on 2 Jun 44 an Embassy car collected us for the drive to Madrid. At last we could relax and after seeing the Air Attache he arranged for us to be driven through the gates of Gibraltar with the Union Jack flying proudly.

On 5 Jun 44 Hindle and I were flown home by Dakota, landing at Whitchurch in the early hours of D-Day. We were unaware of it until later when we arrived in London.

Our mission had not been a success but I know from first hand that a great deal of arms and ammunition was recovered from the wreckage of our Halifax by members of the French Resistance before the Germans were able to prevent them.

During a short leave, by a remarkable coincidence I met up again with John Battilotti. I had a boat out on the Serpentine with my wife when suddenly a man in another boat stood up and waved his arms about, shouting 'Hi there, Johnny!' He was on leave also, before returning for duty, and was enjoying himself with a newly acquired girlfriend.

In 1946 I received a letter from France with the opening line; 'Do you remember me? I am the whistler of 'The Last Rose of Summer'. I did indeed, with great pride and gratitude remember Maurice, Andre and all the courageous people who so valued freedom.

Ed: *John's story can be found in 'The Freedom Trail' by Scott Goodall. If you cannot find a copy let the editor know and he will lend you his copy.*

The following verse was written by Fg Off Reid Miller RNZAF who was killed in action on 19 Jan 45. It seals John's story so well:

When the last long flight is over,
And the happy landing past,
And the altimeter tells me
The crack has come at last;
Then I'll meet my fellow pilots
No longer flying low,
As I stow my crate in the hangar
On the field where fliers go.
Then we'll fly for ever,
With the Almighty Flying Boss,
and ride all Heaven's airways
From Orion to the Cross.

Fg Off Jack Ball DFC

Our next profile will be on Jack who flew Lancasters with 625 Squadron. He was awarded the DFC and here is the citation:

Fg Off Arthur John BALL, 179079 RAFVR No 625 Sqn

Fg Off Ball is the Captain and Pilot of a Lancaster aircraft and has almost completed a very successful first tour of operations consisting of 32 sorties comprising 175 operational flying hours. He has attacked many targets in Germany and the occupied countries including Dortmund (2), Dusseldorf, Gelsenkirchen, Cologne (3) and Essen (2), and has pressed home each attack in spite of severe weather on several occasions and heavy opposition of flak. This officer has consistently set a very high standard and has always carried out his tasks in a most determined manner, and his cheerfulness and fearlessness on all occasions has been very noticeable throughout his tour. He is a fine leader, skillful pilot and has shown commendable courage and devotion to duty. He has always set a fine example to his crew and by his gallant leadership has completed a most successful tour of operations

Ed: *As you may remember Jack passed away in September last year but thanks to his daughter Stephanie we now have his life story. We will start the series next month.*

Drone Pilots awarded 'Wings'



The Reaper Drone

Four newly qualified pilots will now fly the Reaper MQ-9 aircraft in missions against the Taliban in Afghanistan, from the US military base more than 7,000 miles away, near Las Vegas.

Although the RAF already has drone pilots, these four are the first to be trained specifically to fly unmanned aircraft. Until now, all those operating its drones have been qualified aircrew from manned aircraft.

The change follows the creation by the RAF of a specialist section in its "flying branch" - alongside those for fast jets, multi-engine aircraft and helicopters - for those operating what it describes as "Remotely Piloted Air Systems" (RPAS). Like all RAF pilots, the graduates completed their basic training, in which they learned to fly a manned aircraft. After completing that phase, while their colleagues went on to specialise in more conventional aircraft, the four began instruction in unmanned aircraft.



RPAS Wings with blue laurel

As the machines cannot currently be flown in the UK, under aviation laws, they trained in the USA, before graduating at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, USA, last month.

Well that was the basis of the RAF Press release but as the various websites show there has been quite a reaction (mostly negative) to the news. Probably one of the best replies I spotted was this :

'Why are we not re-training some of our brightest NCOs / SNCOs / Officers who have lost their legs in Afghanistan to complete this role rather than kicking the poor buggers out!'

As our Chairman mentioned, should they qualify for membership? I can't wait for the next edition of the RAFA News!

Visiting the Battle of Britain Bunker

The Bunker at Uxbridge is now available for guided visits every weekday, usually at 10am and 2pm, and every weekend for a trial period of three months (until 29th/30th June 2013). Bookings required midweek but at weekends visitors can simply turn up and look around between 10am - 4pm. There is no charge for admission but we recommend a minimum donation of £3.00 per person.

For more information please call 01895 238154, or email 11gpenquiries@btconnect.com

Directions to the Battle of Britain Bunker, RAF Uxbridge:

From the A40 – Take the exit for the B467 Uxbridge/Harefield/Ickenham. At the roundabout take the exit towards Uxbridge then go straight on at the traffic lights (B483). Old entrance to RAF Uxbridge
Go past Uxbridge College on the left, then at the traffic lights turn left onto Honeycroft Hill. Take the fourth right onto Honey Hill, which becomes Vine Lane. Pass the entrance to ACS Hillingdon International School on your left, then take the next right onto St Andrew's Road. Follow St Andrew's Road to a large white house (Hillingdon House), then turn left. The entrance to the Battle of Britain Bunker, RAF Uxbridge is directly in front of you.

The nearest postcode to the entrance is UB10 0RN.

Ed: *They will be reviewing the opening times, depending on how many visitors they get, so why not get a car load together and give them a ring. It is well worth a visit.*

Programme**Welfare**

All events at 1030 for 1100 at Greenacres unless advised (*)

- 12 May Commonwealth Air Force Service, Runnymede 1030am***
- 15 May Guest's Lunch* 1200 Noon**
- 19 Jun Aeronautical Artist - Chris Sprent
- 17 Jul Air Traffic Control - Peter Marks
- 21 Aug S.O.E. - Hugh Davies
- 18 Sep Guest's Lunch* 1200 Noon
- 16 Oct Member's Meeting
- 20 Nov The Lightening - Alan Merriman
- 18 Dec Christmas Lunch* 1200 Noon

Your Committee**Chairman****Geoff Hulett**

11 Pearsewood Gardens, Stanmore, Middx HA7 1NU

Tel: 0208 952 4092

Email: banghulett@btinternet.com

Newsletter Editor/Secretary

Graham Laurie 19 High St, Prestwood, Gt Missenden,

Bucks HP16 9EE

Tel: 01494 863492

Email: graham@kitty4.co.uk

Membership Secretary**Gerry Sealy-Bell**

31, Hempstead Road, Kings Langley, Herts, WD4 8BR

Tel: 01923 262707

Treasurer**Rod Finn**

67 Hayfield, Chells Manor Village, Stevenage SG2 7JR

Tel: 01438 350115

Email: rodfinn@btinternet.com

Welfare**Bill Hyland**

57, Limes Avenue, Aylesbury, Bucks., HP21 7HD

Tel: 01296 415386

E-Mail: johnhyland228@btinternet.com

Programme Secretary**Bill George**

Blossom Cottage, 54, Green End Street, Aston Clinton,

Bucks, HP22 5EX

Tel: 01296 630998

Email: bill.bbgi@btinternet.com

Welcome to Spring at last, should help to thaw out the bones a little! Apart from the odd late frost of course. Jack Easter has spent another short spell in Stoke Mandeville Hospital after a fall. Glad to say he is now safely back at home. Jack still lives on his own in his bungalow albeit with a little help from carers and friends. It is great to be able to do that for as long as is practically possible. We are getting an increasing number of members in Homes of one sort or another including Don Francis, George Carter, Jim Tomlinson and Johnny Johns. If anyone would like their new addresses let me or one of the Committee know and we'll get it to you.

Looking back over that, it will be old news to our regular attendees but good for those who can't make it to Greenacres. Perhaps we should include a little news from our regular Members for inclusion in the Newsletter to let our less fortunate friends know what you are up to. Don't be surprised if I buttonhole you for a couple of lines of information at future meetings. Enjoy the sun.

Bill**Membership**

Our membership now stands at 60. Could you please amend your list with a change of address for the following 2 members:

135 JOHNS R.B. (Johnny) Roxholm Care Home, Roxholm Hall, Sleaford, Lincs NG34 8ND Tel: 01526 832128

149 TOMLINSON J. (Jim) The Lodge, 5 Broad Street, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 5BW Tel: 01442 244722

Cheerio for now

Gerry**Treasurer**

Slowly but surely we are beating HSBC into submission with the forms to enable certain committee members to countersign our cheques!

Rod

Buffet Lunch

Greenacres Tavern

Wednesday 15th May 2013

Noon for 12.30pm (Please do not arrive before Noon)

Cost £7.00 per head

Please complete the form below and send to Gerry Sealy-Bell together with cheque payable to 'Aircrew Association' and a stamped addressed envelope, the closing date for postal requests is Monday 6 May 2013. Tickets will also be on sale at our April meeting.

----- Please Tear here -----

Buffet Lunch

Greenacres Tavern

Wednesday 15th May 2013

NAME:

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

TELEPHONE

Please send me tickets for the buffet lunch on 15 May 13.

I enclose cheque for £..... and a stamped addressed envelope

Post to: Gerry Sealy-Bell, 31 Hempstead Road, Kings Langley, Herts WD4 8BR